

GAO

Testimony

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# OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

## DOD Should Apply Lessons Learned Concerning the Need for Security over Conventional Munitions Storage Sites to Future Operations Planning

Statement of Davi M. D'Agostino, Director  
Defense Capabilities and Management





Highlights of [GAO-07-639T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

## Why GAO Did This Study

GAO is releasing a report today on lessons learned concerning the need for security over conventional munitions storage sites which provides the basis for this testimony. Following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003—known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)—concerns were raised about how the Department of Defense (DOD) secured Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites during and after major combat operations. This testimony addresses (1) the security provided by U.S. forces over Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites and (2) DOD actions to mitigate risks associated with an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites for future operations on the basis of OIF lessons learned. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed OIF war plans, joint doctrine and policy, intelligence reports, and interviewed senior-level DOD officials.

## What GAO Recommends

The report GAO is releasing today recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to (1) conduct a theaterwide survey and risk assessment on unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq, (2) report related risk mitigation strategies and results to Congress, and (3) incorporate conventional munitions storage site security as a strategic planning factor into all levels of planning policy and guidance. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-639T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-639T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

# OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

## DOD Should Apply Lessons Learned Concerning the Need for Security over Conventional Munitions Storage Sites to Future Operations Planning

### What GAO Found

The overwhelming size and number of conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq combined with certain prewar planning assumptions that proved to be invalid, resulted in U.S. forces not adequately securing these sites and widespread looting, according to field unit, lessons learned, and intelligence reports. Pre-OIF estimates of Iraq's conventional munitions varied significantly, with the higher estimate being 5 times greater than the lower estimate. Conventional munitions storage sites were looted after major combat operations and some remained vulnerable as of October 2006. According to lessons learned reports and senior-level DOD officials, the widespread looting occurred because DOD had insufficient troop levels to secure conventional munitions storage sites due to several OIF planning priorities and assumptions. DOD's OIF planning priorities included quickly taking Baghdad on a surprise basis rather than using an overwhelming force. The plan also assumed that the regular Iraqi army units would "capitulate and provide internal security." According to an Army lessons learned study, this assumption was central to the decision to limit the amount of combat power deployed to Iraq. GAO analysis showed that the war plan did not document risk mitigation strategies in case assumptions were proven wrong. Furthermore, DOD did not have a centrally managed program for the disposition of enemy munitions until August 2003, after widespread looting had already occurred. According to officials from Multi-National Coalition-Iraq, unsecured conventional munitions continue to pose a threat to U.S. forces and others. Not securing these conventional munitions storage sites has been costly, as government reports indicated that looted munitions are being used to make improvised explosive devices (IED) that have killed or maimed many people, and will likely continue to support terrorist attacks in the region. As of October 2006, the Multi-National Coalition-Iraq stated that some remote sites have not been revisited to verify if they pose any residual risk nor have they been physically secured.

DOD has taken many actions in response to OIF lessons learned, however, DOD has given little focus to mitigating the risks to U.S. forces posed by an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites in future operations planning. DOD's actions generally have emphasized countering the use of IEDs by resistance groups during post-hostility operations. GAO concludes that U.S. forces will face increased risk from this emerging asymmetric threat when an adversary uses unconventional means to counter U.S. military strengths. For example, potential adversaries are estimated to have a significant amount of munitions that would require significant manpower to secure or destroy. GAO concludes that this situation shows both that Iraqi stockpiles of munitions may not be an anomaly and that information on the amount and location of an adversary's munitions can represent a strategic planning consideration for future operations. However, without joint guidance, DOD cannot ensure that OIF lessons learned about the security of an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites will be integrated into future operations planning and execution.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here this morning to discuss GAO's report being released today on the Department of Defense's (DOD) efforts to plan for the security of former Iraqi conventional weapons sites and the lessons learned for planning future operations. In March 2003, citing the failure of Iraq to cooperate with weapons inspectors and other concerns, the United States and its coalition allies invaded Iraq in an operation known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The Commander of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) was primarily responsible for developing and executing the war plan for OIF.<sup>1</sup> The war plan's military priorities included overthrowing the Iraqi regime by rapidly capturing Baghdad and disarming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Although WMD stockpiles were not found, Iraq had hundreds of thousands of tons of conventional munitions throughout the country at various storage sites.<sup>2</sup> The widespread looting of some Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites during OIF has been the subject of media reports. We previously reported on the looting and dispersal of radiological sources from a number of sites in Iraq after the invasion and DOD's efforts to collect and secure those sources.<sup>3</sup> My statement today addresses (1) the security provided by U.S. forces over conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq, and (2) DOD actions to mitigate risks associated with an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites for future operations on the basis of OIF lessons learned.

The observations I will discuss today are based on the unclassified version of our classified report on this topic.<sup>4</sup> To examine the security over Iraqi conventional munitions storage sites provided by U.S. forces, we reviewed field unit reporting and intelligence products and interviewed DOD

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<sup>1</sup>CENTCOM is one of five geographic combatant commands. A combatant command is a unified command established by the President of the United States with a broad continuing mission under a single commander.

<sup>2</sup>Conventional munitions are complete devices charged with explosives, propellants, pyrotechnics, or initiating composition that are not nuclear, biological, or chemical for use in military operations.

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Radiological Sources in Iraq: DOD Should Evaluate Its Source Recovery Effort and Apply Lessons Learned to Further Recovery Missions*, [GAO-05-672](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 7, 2005).

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Operation Iraqi Freedom, DOD Should Apply Lessons Learned Concerning the Need for Security over Conventional Munitions Storage Sites to Future Operations Planning*, [GAO-7-444](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 22, 2007).

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officials. We also collected and analyzed the various iterations of OIF plans, doctrine, and concepts of operations for coverage of the security of conventional munitions storage sites. To examine DOD's actions to learn from its experience with securing conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq and apply these lessons learned to mitigate risks during future operations, we interviewed DOD officials about their efforts to identify and document lessons learned and examined documents on operations in Iraq. We performed our work from November 2005 through October 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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## Summary

The overwhelming size and number of conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq, combined with prewar planning priorities and certain prewar planning assumptions that proved to be invalid, resulted in U.S. forces not adequately securing these sites and widespread looting, according to DOD sources. Pre-OIF estimates of Iraq's conventional munitions varied significantly, with the higher estimate being five times greater than the lower estimate. Although the amount of looted munitions is unknown, field unit reports, numerous intelligence assessments, and imagery products showed that many conventional munitions storage sites were looted after major combat operations and some may remain vulnerable. In October 2006, we could not verify that all sites had been physically secured. According to lessons learned reports and knowledgeable senior-level DOD officials, including field commanders, the widespread looting occurred because DOD had insufficient troop levels to secure conventional munitions storage sites due to several OIF planning priorities and assumptions that proved to be invalid. For example, the OIF war plan assumed that the regular Iraqi army units would "capitulate and provide internal security" and resistance was unlikely. Knowledgeable senior-level DOD officials stated that these Iraqi army units would have been used to secure conventional munitions storage sites. Our analysis of the various iterations of the war plan found that the OIF war plan did not examine the consequences of these and other important planning assumptions being proven wrong. Furthermore, DOD did not have a centrally managed program for the disposition of enemy munitions until August 2003, after widespread looting had already occurred. While DOD had destroyed, disposed of or secured 417,000 tons of munitions, Multi-National Coalition-Iraq officials told us unsecured munitions continued to pose a threat. Not securing these conventional munitions storage sites has been costly. For example, looted munitions are being used to construct improvised explosive devices (IED) that have killed or maimed many people and maintain the level of violence against U.S. and coalition forces and their Iraqi partners, which has hampered the achievement of the strategic goal

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of stability in Iraq. Moreover, estimates indicate that the looted munitions will likely continue to support terrorist attacks throughout the region.

While DOD has taken many actions in response to OIF lessons learned, because of DOD's understandable focus on current operations, DOD has given little focus to mitigating the risk to U.S. forces posed by an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites in future operations planning. Instead, the department's actions in response to OIF lessons learned generally have emphasized countering the use of IEDs by an insurgency or terrorists during post-hostility operations. Although these actions are good first steps, our review of DOD publications—such as doctrine, policy, guidance, and procedures issued by the joint staff—used to guide operational planning and execution found little evidence of guidance concerning the security of conventional munitions storage sites. Without appropriate joint doctrine, policy, guidance, and procedures, DOD cannot ensure that OIF lessons learned regarding the security of an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites will be a strategic planning and priority-setting consideration that is integrated into future operations planning and execution, so that these munitions do not become the source of materials for making IEDs.

Our report recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff to (1) conduct a theaterwide survey and risk assessment regarding unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq; (2) report ensuing risk mitigation strategies and results to Congress; and (3) incorporate consideration of conventional munitions storage sites security into all levels of planning policy and guidance, including joint doctrine, instructions, manuals, and other directives. DOD partially concurred with our recommendations.

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## Background

When the United States and its coalition allies invaded Iraq on March 17, 2003, and the Iraqi government no longer functioned, many areas experienced widespread looting and the breakdown of public services, such as electricity and water in the cities. U.S. and coalition forces were then confronted with the challenges of restoring public order and infrastructure even before combat operations ceased. Given the extensive looting, as we reported in 2005, DOD could not assume that facilities and items within the facilities would remain intact or in place for later collection without being secured.<sup>5</sup> Many facilities, such as abandoned

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<sup>5</sup>[GAO-05-672](#).

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government research facilities and industrial complexes, were no longer under the control of the former regime and had been looted. For example, hundreds of tons of explosive materials that had been documented by the International Atomic Energy Agency prior to March 2003 at the Al Qa Qaa explosives and munitions facility in Iraq were lost after April 9, 2003, through the theft and looting of the unsecured installations. We also reported that regarding radiological sources in Iraq, DOD was not ready to collect and secure radiological sources when the war began in March 2003 and for about 6 months thereafter.<sup>6</sup>

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## U.S. and Coalition Forces Were Unable to Adequately Secure Conventional Munitions Storage Sites, Resulting in Widespread Looting

According to knowledgeable DOD officials, field unit reports, lessons learned reports, and intelligence information, U.S. and coalition forces were unable to adequately secure conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq, resulting in widespread looting of munitions. These sources indicated that U.S. and coalition forces were overwhelmed by the number and size of conventional munitions storage sites, and DOD had insufficient troop levels to secure these sites because of prewar planning priorities and certain assumptions that proved to be invalid. Despite war plan and intelligence estimates of large quantities of munitions in Iraq, knowledgeable DOD officials reported that DOD did not plan for or set up a program to centrally manage and destroy enemy munitions until August 2003, well after the completion of major combat operations in May 2003. The costs of not securing these conventional munitions storage sites have been high, as looted explosives and ammunition from these sites have been used to construct IEDs that have killed and maimed people. Furthermore, estimates indicate such munitions are likely to continue to support terrorist attacks in the region.

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## U.S. Forces Were Overwhelmed by the Number and Size of Conventional Munitions Storage Sites, Leaving Those Sites Vulnerable to Looting

U.S. forces were overwhelmed by the number and size of conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq and they did not adequately secure these sites during and immediately after the conclusion of major combat operations, according to senior-level military officials, field unit reports, lessons learned reports, and intelligence reports. Pre-OIF estimates of Iraq's conventional munitions varied significantly with the higher estimate being five times greater than the lower estimate. The commander of CENTCOM testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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<sup>6</sup>GAO-05-672.

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on September 24, 2003, that “there is more ammunition in Iraq than any place I’ve ever been in my life, and it is all not securable.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the sites remained vulnerable from April 2003 through the time of our review. For example, an assessment conducted from April 2003 through June 2003 indicated that most military garrisons associated with Iraq’s former republican guard had been extensively looted and vandalized after the military campaign phase of OIF ended. It concluded that the most prized areas for looting were the depots or storage areas. The assessment further concluded that the thorough nature of the looting and the seemingly targeted concentration on storage areas suggested that much of the looting in the areas assessed was conducted by organized elements that were likely aided or spearheaded by Iraqi military personnel.

Moreover, in early 2004, 401 Iraqi sites—including fixed garrisons, field sites, and ammunition production facilities—were reviewed to assess their vulnerability and the likelihood that anticoalition forces were obtaining munitions from those sites. Of the 401 sites, a small number of sites were considered highly vulnerable because of the large quantity of munitions, inadequate security, and a high level of looting. The majority of the sites were assessed as having low vulnerability—not because they had been secured, but because they had been abandoned or totally looted. The review considered virtually all the sites to be partially secured at best and concluded that U.S. and coalition troops were able to guard only a very small percentage of the sites.

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## U.S. Forces Had Insufficient Troop Levels to Provide Adequate Security Because of OIF Planning Priorities and Assumptions

DOD senior-level officials and lessons learned reports stated that U.S. forces did not have sufficient troop levels to provide adequate security for conventional munitions storage sites in Iraq because of OIF planning priorities and certain assumptions that proved to be invalid. According to DOD officials, ground commanders had two top priorities during major combat operations that were set forth in the February 2003 OIF war plan. First, to overthrow the regime, DOD planned for and successfully executed a rapid march on Baghdad that relied on surprise and speed rather than massive troop buildup, such as was used in 1991 during the first Gulf War. This rapid march to Baghdad successfully resulted in the

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<sup>7</sup>Fiscal Year 2004 Supplemental Request for Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan: Hearings Before the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, 108th Cong. 133 (2003).

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removal of the regime. Another critical planning priority was finding and securing the regime's stockpiles of WMD, which the administration believed were a threat to coalition forces and other countries in the region. The OIF war plan assumed that there was a high probability that the regime would use WMD against U.S. and coalition forces in a final effort to survive when those forces reached Baghdad. As a result, a CENTCOM planner for OIF stated that ground commanders had to prioritize limited available resources against the volume of tasks, both stated and implied, contained in the war plan.

Several critical planning assumptions upon which the February 2003 OIF war plan was based also contributed to the number of U.S. troops being insufficient for the mission of securing conventional munitions storage sites, including the following:

- **The Iraqi regular army would “capitulate and provide security.”** The OIF war plan assumed that large numbers of Iraqi military and security forces would opt for unit capitulation over individual surrender or desertion. As stated in the OIF war plan, the U.S. Commander, CENTCOM, intended to preserve, as much as possible, the Iraqi military to maintain internal security and protect Iraq's borders during and after major combat operations. According to a study prepared by the Center for Army Lessons Learned, this assumption was central to the decision to limit the amount of combat power deployed to Iraq.<sup>8</sup> On May 23, 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority dissolved the Iraqi Army, which the CENTCOM commander assumed would provide internal security.
- **Iraqi resistance was unlikely.** Although the OIF war plan laid out the probability of several courses of action that the regime might take in response to an invasion, the plan did not consider the possibility of protracted, organized Iraqi resistance to U.S. and coalition forces after the conclusion of major combat operations. As a result, DOD officials stated that the regime's conventional munitions storage sites were not considered a significant risk.
- **Postwar Iraq would not be a U.S. military responsibility.** The OIF war planning, according to a Joint Forces Command lessons learned report, was based on the assumption that the bulk of the Iraqi

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<sup>8</sup>Office of the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, *On Point: U.S. Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: 2004).



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government would remain in place after major combat operations and therefore civil functions, including rebuilding and humanitarian assistance, could be shifted from military forces to U.S. and international organizations and, ultimately, the Iraqis, within about 18 months after the end of major combat operations.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, DOD initially did not plan for an extended occupation of the country or the level of troops that would be needed to secure conventional munitions storage sites in particular or the country in general.

Joint assessments further showed that OIF planning assumptions contributed to security challenges in Iraq. According to a 2006 report by the Joint Center for Operational Analysis, OIF planning did not examine the consequences of those assumptions proving wrong, further contributing to insufficient force levels to prevent the breakdown of civil order in Iraq.<sup>10</sup> The Joint Staff strategic-level lessons learned report also discussed the effect inaccurate planning assumptions had on force levels. According to this report, overemphasis on planning assumptions that could not be validated prior to critical decision points resulted in a force structure plan that did not consider several missions requiring troops, such as providing security for enemy conventional munitions storage sites.

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### DOD Did Not Set Up a Program to Centrally Manage and Destroy Iraqi Munitions until after the Completion of Major Combat Operations

Despite prewar intelligence assessments of large amounts of conventional munitions, knowledgeable DOD officials stated that DOD did not set up a central office until July 2003 or set up a program to centrally manage and destroy Iraqi munitions until after August 2003. These steps were taken well after major combat operations were completed in May 2003, because the department did not perceive conventional munitions storage sites as a threat. The central office was initially set up to address operational problems found during an assessment of nine Iraqi sites. This assessment found that DOD lacked priorities for securing the sites and uniform procedures and practices for securing and disposing of munitions. It also uncovered serious safety problems in the handling, transportation, storage, and disposal of munitions.

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<sup>9</sup>U.S. Joint Forces Command, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, *Operation Iraqi Freedom May 2003 to June 2004: Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction in a Counterinsurgency (Part One)* (Norfolk, Va.: January 2006).

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Joint Forces Command, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, *Operation Iraqi Freedom May 2003 to June 2004: Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction in a Counterinsurgency (Part Two)*.

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In August 2003, the Engineering and Support Center awarded contracts for the Coalition Munitions Clearance Program, and the first demolition of munitions under the program was conducted in September 2003. The program's initial goals were to destroy the stockpiles at six depots and to have all enemy ammunition outside the depots destroyed or transported to the depots. The program also was tasked with assisting in the establishment, management, and transfer of depots to the new Iraqi army. According to the Engineering and Support Center, the program has received more than \$1 billion and has destroyed or secured more than 324,000 tons of munitions. This number, combined with military disposal operations, has accounted for more than 417,000 tons of munitions, leaving an unknown amount of conventional munitions in the hands of resistance groups or unsecured. This unknown amount could range significantly, from thousands to millions of tons of unaccounted conventional munitions.

According to Multi-National Coalition-Iraq officials, unsecured conventional munitions from the former regime continue to pose a risk to U.S. forces and others. For example, some conventional munitions storage sites in remote locations have not been assessed recently to verify whether they pose any residual risk. These officials also stated that smaller caches of weapons, munitions, and equipment as well as remaining unexploded ordnance, scattered across Iraq, represent a more pressing and continuing risk. These officials said that the coalition is working to reduce this risk by searching for and finding a growing number of caches, but it will be some time before it can clean up all the munitions in Iraq. The extent of the threat from smaller caches, however, is difficult to quantify because the location or amount of munitions hidden or scattered around the country is unknown.

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### Costs of Not Securing Conventional Munitions Storage Sites Have Been High

As reported by DOD and key government agencies, the human, strategic, and financial costs of not securing conventional munitions storage sites have been high. Estimates indicate that the weapons and explosives looted from unsecured conventional munitions storage sites will likely continue to support terrorist attacks throughout the region. Government agencies also have assessed that looted munitions are being used in the construction of IEDs. IEDs have proven to be an effective tactic because they are inexpensive, relatively simple to employ, deadly, anonymous, and

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have great strategic value.<sup>11</sup> To illustrate, the Congressional Research Service reported in 2005 that IEDs caused about half of all U.S. combat fatalities and casualties in Iraq and are killing hundreds of Iraqis. Moreover, Multinational Forces in Iraq reported that the attacks against the coalition and its Iraqi partners continued to increase through July 2006, representing at least 40 percent of all attacks on coalition forces.

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## DOD's Actions in Response to OIF Lessons Learned Have Not Focused on Securing Conventional Munitions Storage Sites during Future Operations

While DOD has taken many actions in response to OIF lessons learned, we found that to date DOD has not taken action to incorporate the security of an adversary's conventional munitions storage sites as a strategic planning and priority-setting consideration during planning for future operations. A critical OIF lesson learned is that unsecured conventional munitions storage sites can be an asymmetric threat to U.S. forces, as illustrated by intelligence assessments that show one potential adversary, for example, also has considerable munitions stockpiles that would require a sizable occupying force to secure or destroy. Despite the strategic implications regarding unsecured conventional munitions storage sites, our analysis shows that securing those sites generally is not explicitly addressed in military policy and guidance, particularly at the joint level. We reviewed 17 DOD publications—which Joint Staff officials told us were relevant to our review—to determine the extent to which each of those publications contained guidance on the security of conventional munitions storage sites. A list of these publications can be found in our March 2007 report.<sup>12</sup> In reviewing these documents, we found little evidence of guidance regarding conventional munitions storage site security. Although several publications addressed defeating IEDs during an insurgency after major combat operations have ended or provided tactical-level guidance on how to dispose of explosive hazards, including munitions, or make those hazards safe, none explicitly addressed the security of conventional munitions storage sites during or after major combat operations as a tactical, operational, or strategic risk.

Because of DOD's understandable focus on current operations, the department's actions in response to OIF lessons learned generally have

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<sup>11</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Improvised Explosive Devices in Iraq: Effects and Countermeasures*, RS22330 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 23, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> GAO, *Operation Iraqi Freedom, DOD Should Apply Lessons Learned Concerning the Need for Security over Conventional Munitions Storage Sites to Future Operations Planning*, GAO-7-444 (Washington, D.C.: March 22, 2007).

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emphasized countering the use of IEDs by an insurgency or terrorists during posthostility operations. The specific actions DOD has taken are discussed in our report. These actions are good first steps toward broadening DOD's focus beyond the ongoing tactical and operational counter-IED efforts used against Saddam loyalists, rejectionists, or external terrorist groups in Iraq to planning and executing strategic counter-IED campaigns for future operations. However, the actions do not directly address the strategic importance of securing conventional munitions storage sites during major combat operations so that they do not become the source of materials for making IEDs during an occupation or become used for other forms of armed resistance.

Based on our work, a critical OIF lesson learned is that unsecured conventional munitions storage sites can represent an asymmetric threat to U.S. forces during future operations. Furthermore, other potential adversaries are also learning lessons from the United States' experiences in Iraq and will likely use asymmetric warfare against U.S. invading forces. We believe these potential adversaries will likely develop military doctrine to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States if possible and try to undermine the United States' political commitment with unconventional warfare. Therefore, the number, size, and geographic separation of an adversary's munitions storage sites could pose a significant security challenge during an occupying force's follow-on operations. A large amount of munitions in such an adversary's country could require an occupying force to dedicate significant manpower to secure or destroy the contents of the major munitions storage sites. Furthermore, the remnants of an adversary's forces, insurgents, or terrorists could draw from any large conventional munitions storage network left unsecured by an occupying force.

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## Conclusions and Recommendations

In our report, we concluded that a fundamental gap existed between the OIF war plan assumptions and the experiences of U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, contributing to insufficient troops being on the ground to prevent widespread looting of conventional munitions storage sites and resulting in looted munitions being a continuing asymmetric threat to U.S. and coalition forces. The human, strategic, and financial costs of this failure to provide sufficient troops have been high, with IEDs made with looted munitions causing about half of all U.S. combat fatalities and casualties in Iraq and killing hundreds of Iraqis and contributing to increasing instability, challenging U.S. strategic goals in Iraq. Further, DOD does not appear to have conducted a theaterwide survey and assessed the risk associated with unsecured conventional munitions storage sites to U.S.

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forces and others. Such a survey and assessment combined with associated risk mitigation strategies—such as providing more troops or other security measures—could assist DOD in conserving lives and in meeting its strategic goal to leave a stable nation behind when U.S. forces ultimately leave Iraq. We recommended that the Joint Chief of Staff conduct a theaterwide survey and risk assessment regarding unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq and report ensuing risk mitigation strategies and the results of those strategies to Congress.

We also concluded that in preparing for future operations DOD's actions in response to OIF lessons learned primarily have focused on countering IEDs and not on the security of conventional munitions storage sites as a strategic planning and priority-setting consideration for future operations. Although good first steps, these actions do not address what we believe is a critical OIF lesson learned, the strategic importance of securing conventional munitions storage sites during and after major combat operations. Unsecured conventional munitions storage sites can represent an asymmetric threat to U.S. forces that would require significant manpower or other resources during and after major combat operations to secure. Therefore, since joint doctrine is to present fundamental principles as well as contemporary lessons that guide the employment of forces, we believe that it is important that DOD clearly and explicitly address the security of conventional munitions storage sites in revisions to joint doctrine. Therefore we recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff incorporate conventional munitions storage site security as a strategic planning factor into all levels of planning policy and guidance, including joint doctrine, instructions, manuals, and other directives.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

DOD partially concurred with our first recommendation that the department conduct a theaterwide survey and risk assessment regarding unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq. DOD stated that while it is imperative that a complete and thorough assessment of conventional munitions storage sites be conducted, military commanders in theater are aware of the significant risk posed by the sites, and similar studies and assessments have been conducted over the past 3 years. DOD also stated that from a manpower perspective, an in-depth, theaterwide survey is not feasible without significantly degrading ongoing efforts in Iraq and the region. As the evidence in our report clearly supports, we made this recommendation because we did not see any evidence of a strategic-level survey or an effective, theaterwide risk mitigation strategy to address the commanders' awareness of this significant risk or the findings of the studies and assessments regarding security of conventional munitions

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storage sites. Accordingly, the intent behind our recommendation is to have DOD assess the risks associated with unsecured conventional munitions sites on a strategic, theaterwide basis to develop an effective risk mitigation strategy.

DOD partially concurred with our second recommendation that the department report ensuing risk mitigation strategies and the results of those strategies to Congress. In commenting on this recommendation, DOD stated that risk mitigation is doctrinally sound; however, the department and Joint Staff recommend that these briefings to Congress remain at the strategic level. In making this recommendation, it was not our intention to detract tactical units from the current warfighting mission or to suggest congressional oversight is needed for each tactical unit. Instead, we are recommending that DOD alert Congress of its assessment and the actions being taken to mitigate the strategic risk associated with unsecured conventional munitions in Iraq.

DOD partially concurred with our third recommendation that the department incorporate the security of conventional munitions storage sites as a strategic planning factor into all levels of planning policy and guidance and stated that the Joint Staff will incorporate the appropriate language in joint doctrine, manuals, and instructions. DOD stated that (1) Iraq is a separate case and should not be considered the standard for all future operations and (2) war plans must reflect proper prioritization based on desired operational effects and resources available as it may not always be possible or desirable in a resource- and time-constrained environment to secure all sites or destroy all munitions. We agree with these statements. The purpose of this report was not to suggest that Iraq be the standard for all future conflicts or to restrict commanders' planning prerogatives. Instead, the report suggests that as DOD incorporates OIF lessons learned into joint doctrine, it includes what is a key OIF lesson learned—an adversary's stockpile of conventional munitions can be an asymmetric threat to U.S. forces.

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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## Contacts and Acknowledgements

For questions about this statement, please contact Davi D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431. Other individuals making key contributions to this statement include: Mike Kennedy, Assistant Director, Renee Brown, Donna Byers, John Van Schiak, and Nicole Volchko.

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